

AFFILIATE MARKETING IN THE ERA OF TIKTOK: A REVIEW ON CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION AND BEHAVIORAL INSIGHTS

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Abstract

The rise of TikTok as a social commerce platform has transformed the landscape of affiliate marketing, blurring the boundaries between entertainment, engagement and consumer behavior. While affiliate marketing is widely recognized for its influence on purchasing decisions, limited research has examined this phenomenon through the lens of consumer behavior and purchase intention. Addressing this gap, this paper presents a comprehensive review of twelve empirical studies published between 2023 and 2025 that investigate affiliate marketing and consumer purchase intention within the TikTok ecosystem. The review synthesizes findings across studies to identify the key determinants influencing consumer purchase intention including trust, social influence, content quality, interactivity and perceived value. Informed by behavioral and marketing perspectives particularly insights consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the analysis highlights how consumers' attitudes, social validation and sense of control shape purchase motivation in affiliate-driven environments. The results indicate that authenticity, live streaming engagement and peer-based validation are critical to building trust and converting attention into purchasing action. From a practical standpoint, the review emphasizes that successful affiliate marketing on TikTok requires relatable content, ethical influencer partnerships and culturally resonant communication strategies.

Keywords: TikTok, social commerce, affiliate marketing, purchase intentions, behavioural insight

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INTRODUCTION

Social commerce is a growing trend where users make purchases directly via social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook and Instagram (Rachmad, 2022). TikTok has revolutionized social commerce by introducing TikTok Shop that allowing users to shop directly within the app. This

seamless integration of entertainment, social interaction and shopping has created a unique digital ecosystem. The platform's gross merchandise value (GMV) has grown remarkably, rising from around USD 1 billion in 2021 to USD 33 billion in 2024. Since social commerce originated in Asia, it is unsurprising that Southeast Asia has become one of TikTok's most successful shopping regions. In 2024, stores from Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia accounted for the majority of TikTok Shops globally with Indonesia alone representing about one-fifth of the total. However, the United States remains TikTok's largest e-commerce market by sales, generating approximately USD 9 billion in GMV in 2024, compared to Indonesia's USD 6.2 billion (Yltävä, 2025).

TikTok is emerging as a dominant platform player in both digital marketing and social commerce on a global scale. Evolving beyond its entertainment roots, TikTok now functions as a hybrid space that merges social interaction with online business activities. The growth of TikTok as a social commerce platform reflects the broader digital marketing trend that emphasizes creative short-form video content to capture and sustain consumer attention (Kwan, 2023).

Through its advertising capabilities and affiliate initiatives, the platform has developed into a business-oriented ecosystem that significantly shapes global digital trends (Kwan, 2023). This shift requires brands to produce content that is both visually engaging and emotionally appealing to align with the platform's entertainment-driven culture (Diego et al., 2024). According to Diana et al. (2023), the TikTok Affiliate Program serves as a key mechanism linking content creators with merchants through a commission-based model. Operationally, the TikTok Affiliate Program functions similarly to other affiliate marketing systems. Four main parties are involved: (1) merchants, who supply the products for sale; (2) affiliate networks, which act as intermediaries by collecting product catalogues and distributing them to creators; (3) affiliates or content creators, who promote the products through their videos; and (4) consumers, who make purchases via the links or codes provided by affiliates. Kwan (2023) stated that creators promote products by producing short videos that include personalized affiliate links, earning a percentage of sales generated through their content. This system not only provides creators with a sustainable income stream but also allows businesses to expand their market reach efficiently. The yellow shopping basket icon commonly found on TikTok videos symbolizes the presence of affiliate promotions within the platform.

One of the primary advantages of TikTok affiliate marketing lies in its extensive and diverse user base. With audiences spanning various demographic segments, affiliates can effectively target broad and niche markets alike. Moreover, TikTok creators often cultivate strong parasocial relationships with their followers, enhancing their capacity to influence purchasing decisions through personalized recommendations and creative content (Diego et al., 2024).

Empirical findings by Nasution et al. (2023) indicate that affiliate marketing exerts a significant positive impact on consumers' purchase interest, suggesting a direct and favourable relationship between affiliate promotion and buying intention. The stronger the effect of affiliate marketing on purchase intention, the greater the potential benefits for merchants and brands. Diego et al. (2024) stated that TikTok affiliates typically employ creative and engaging content such as music, dance trends, challenges, and storytelling to indirectly promote products, capture attention, and foster emotional resonance with audiences. Consequently, this strategy enhances user engagement, expands follower networks, and ultimately drives higher sales performance.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

According to Tanwar and Sahu (2024), limited research has examined the consumer behavior dimension within affiliate marketing. Since consumers play a vital role in shaping digital business outcomes, it is essential to explore purchase intention in relation to affiliate marketing and consumer experience. Recognizing this gap, this paper reviews existing empirical literature to identify the key determinants and behavioral underpinnings of consumer purchase intention within the TikTok affiliate marketing ecosystem.

The objective of this paper is to synthesize empirical findings on affiliate marketing and consumer purchase intention in the context of TikTok. Informed by behavioral and marketing perspectives, particularly insights consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this review explains how factors such as trust, social influence, and perceived interactivity shape consumers' purchase intentions in social commerce environments.

METHODOLOGY

This article employs a narrative review design to explore how affiliate marketing influences consumer purchase intention with particular emphasis on insights relevant to the Southeast Asian context. Unlike systematic reviews, a narrative review allows for greater flexibility in integrating theoretical, conceptual and empirical findings from a variety of sources to present a comprehensive understanding of current trends and knowledge gaps.

The review was conducted using Google Scholar as the primary database due to its extensive coverage of academic journal articles, conference proceedings, and theses. The search was carried out using the following keyword combinations “affiliate marketing”, “purchase intention” and “Tiktok” which resulted in a total of 4,620 articles being identified.

The selection of literature for this review was guided by several inclusion principles to ensure relevance and quality. Only studies published between 2020 and 2025 were considered, as this period reflects the rapid evolution of social commerce and influencer-based marketing. The review focused exclusively on English-language publications retrieved from Google Scholar that examined the connection between affiliate and consumer behaviour. Studies conducted in Southeast Asian markets, were prioritized to capture cultural and regional similarities. Non-academic materials such as blogs, online articles, and promotional reports were excluded. Following this process, 16 papers were initially identified for review; however, only twelve empirical studies were ultimately selected for detailed analysis and synthesis.

Each selected article was systematically reviewed and summarized according to core aspects, including author(s) and year, research objectives, theoretical framework, methodology, main findings, and suggestions for future research. The analysis adopted a qualitative thematic approach, allowing for the identification of cross-study patterns, emerging trends, and conceptual gaps in the existing body of knowledge.

FINDINGS

Methodological approach used in Reviewed Studies

Across the reviewed articles, quantitative approaches by using survey methods were overwhelmingly dominant such as those by Novilia et al. (2024), Nasution et al. (2023), Dung and An, (2024), Azmi et al. (2025), Lestari (2023), Galih and Siwi (2025), Apriyanto and Affar (2025), Ibrahim and Suhermin (2025), Asadiyah et al. (2023), Krisnandi (2025) and Prasetyo (2025). These studies typically used descriptive and inferential statistics (e.g., regression or SEM using SmartPLS 3.0) to test the influence of affiliate marketing, live streaming, and social interaction on purchase intention.

In contrast, only one study conducted by (Sibulan & Limos-Galay, 2024a) adopted a qualitative case study design exploring perceptions of young professionals through interviews. Despite its depth, this qualitative perspective represents a minority approach among TikTok affiliate marketing studies. None of the reviewed papers employed a mixed-method design, though several (Galih & Siwi, (2025); Ibrahim & Suhermin (2025); Prasetyo (2025)) recommended such integration for future research to capture both behavioral data and psychological insight. However, the dominance of cross-sectional survey designs limits causal interpretation and fails to capture behavioral change over time (Asadiyah et al. (2023); Lestari (2023)).

Sampling of Reviewed Studies

The reviewed studies shared strong similarities in sample composition and demographics. Sampling was mostly purposive, focusing on active TikTok users with prior purchasing experience. The majority targeted Generation Z, particularly individuals aged 15–27 years (Novilia et al., 2024; Nasution et al., 2023; Azmi et al., 2025; Ibrahim & Suhermin, 2025; Asadiyah et al., 2023; Prasetyo, 2025). These respondents were mostly students or early-career adults, with female participants making up between 60% and 80% of samples. A smaller subset of studies examined young professionals, aged 20 to 40 years, as seen in the qualitative work by Sibulan & Limos-Galay (2024).

In terms of geography, research was heavily concentrated in Indonesia such as Medan (Lestari, 2023; Azmi et al., 2025), Surabaya (Ibrahim & Suhermin, 2025), Boyolali (Galih & Siwi, 2025), Semarang (Prasetyo, 2025) with some inclusion of Vietnamese (Dung & An, 2024) and Filipino (Sibulan & Limos-Galay, 2024) respondents. The largest sample size was 302 respondents (Dung & An, 2024), while qualitative work had as few as 20 participants (Sibulan & Limos-Galay, 2024b). Most studies utilized urban-based samples, leading to regional and socioeconomic biases. This urban, Gen Z-centered focus limits external validity and generalizability. Future research should therefore incorporate more diverse demographics (e.g., rural users, older consumers) and cross-regional comparisons to reveal differences in digital purchasing behavior across social and cultural settings.

Theory utilized in Reviewed Studies

Most studies were grounded in classical consumer behavior and marketing theories. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) was widely adopted to explain consumer purchase intentions in online contexts (Dung & An, 2024; Ibrahim & Suhermin, 2025; Prasetyo, 2025). The Consumer Behavior

Theory of Kotler and Keller (2016) supported by Engel et al. (2000) also underpinned many studies (Novilia et al., 2024; Nasution et al., 202); Azmi et al., 2025) as a framework linking marketing stimuli (affiliate content, live streaming, promotional offers) to consumer decisions.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) appeared in Dung and An (2024) study, merged with TPB to explain perceived usefulness and trust in TikTok affiliate marketing systems. More recent frameworks included the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) theory, used by Krisnandi (2025) to explain how interactive content influences emotional responses, and Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) theory, which appeared in both Sibulan and Limos-Galay (2024) and Krisnandi (2025) to describe influencer credibility and message persuasion. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Customer Value Theory were also integrated into the same study by Krisnandi (2025) to illustrate cognitive and affective routes of persuasion. Additionally, Islamic Consumer Behavior Theory was uniquely employed by Prasetyo (2025) to assess how religiosity moderates the relationship between affiliate marketing and purchase intention for halal cosmetic products.

Collectively, these frameworks demonstrate the dominance of behavioral-intention models but also reveal a theoretical gap: limited integration of psychological and emotional dimensions such as digital trust formation, parasocial interaction, and perceived authenticity in influencer marketing.

Themes of Reviewed Studies

The review of twelve empirical studies retrieved from the Google Scholar database provides a comprehensive overview of how affiliate marketing on TikTok influences consumer purchase intention across diverse contexts and demographic segments. These studies, conducted between 2023 and 2025 across Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines, applied both quantitative and qualitative methods grounded in theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R), Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Consumer Behavior Theory. The collective findings emphasize that TikTok’s unique ecosystem characterized by short-form video, influencer-driven content, and interactive commerce features has redefined how consumers engage with affiliate marketing. The synthesis of these studies reveals six key themes: (1) trust and credibility as core determinants, (2) social influence and peer validation, (3) live streaming as an interactive trust builder, (4) content quality and presentation, (5) perceived value and promotional urgency and (6) moderating and mediating variables. Each theme is discussed in detail below, highlighting convergences, contradictions, and implications for future research and practice.

Trust and Credibility as Core Determinants

Trust consistently emerges as the central mechanism connecting affiliate marketing activities to consumer purchase intentions on TikTok. Novilia et al. (2024) found that affiliate marketing had no significant influence on purchase intention because consumers were sceptical of unfamiliar or random TikTok affiliates contrasting with more established platforms such as Instagram. Similarly, Dung and An (2024) demonstrated that among Vietnamese youth trust in brands and after-sales reliability strongly shaped purchasing confidence surpassing other determinants like social influence and promotions. Supporting this, Ibrahim and Suhermin (2025) revealed that brand image functions as a key psychological bridge, affiliate-created storytelling and reviews enhance brand perception which then

increases consumers' purchase intent. Together, these studies indicate that authenticity, transparency and source credibility are vital in making affiliate marketing persuasive on TikTok.

Social Influence and Peer Validation

Social influence is the most dominant predictor of purchase intention across the studies reviewed. Azmi et al. (2025) found that social impact including peer recommendations, micro-influencer opinions and family suggestions was the most significant factor affecting purchase intention. Consumer feedback such as user-generated reviews and positive comments also enhanced purchasing confidence. These findings align with Dung and An (2024), who emphasized that social engagement metrics (likes, shares, reviews) serve as credibility cues that validate consumer decisions. Collectively, these findings confirm that TikTok's community-driven nature amplifies social proof with users relying on peers rather than traditional advertising to make purchase decisions.

Live Streaming as an Interactive Trust Builder

Live streaming has become one of TikTok's most powerful marketing features for influencing consumer purchase intention. Novilia et al. (2024) reported that live streaming significantly enhances purchase intention by creating real-time engagement and fostering trust between sellers and consumers. Ibrahim and Suhermin (2025) further found that live shopping builds product credibility through interactivity and instant feedback. In addition, Prasetyo (2025) identified that both affiliate marketing and live streaming have positive effects on purchase intention in the halal cosmetics segment, with religiosity strengthening the affiliate effect. These studies suggest that live, dynamic interactions allow consumers to observe product authenticity directly, thereby building confidence and reducing perceived risk.

Content Quality and Presentation

The quality and presentation of content are pivotal in determining purchase outcomes. Sibulan and Limos-Galay (2024) identified content quality, audience engagement, product presentation, price comparison and source credibility as the five primary drivers of consumer purchase decisions among young professionals. Similarly, Galih and Siwi (2025) concluded that affiliate marketing, content marketing and product uniqueness positively affect purchase decisions with product distinctiveness being the strongest predictor. Conversely, Krisnandi (2025) noted that while live streaming and content quality positively affect purchasing interest, copywriting and affiliate marketing require better alignment with TikTok's visual and interactive environment. Therefore, successful affiliate marketing on TikTok must emphasize authentic, visually compelling and interactive content rather than relying solely on textual persuasion.

Perceived Value and Promotional Urgency

While discounts and flash sales contribute to purchase intention, their effects vary depending on context and audience. Novilia et al. (2024) found that flash sale programs positively influence purchase intention by creating a sense of urgency through limited time offers. Likewise, Apriyanto and Affar

(2025) reported that both affiliate marketing and promotions significantly affect purchase decisions accounting for nearly half of the explained variance. However, Azmi et al. (2025) observed that promotional factors and perceived usefulness were insignificant among Gen Z users, who viewed TikTok primarily as an entertainment platform rather than a transactional marketplace. These mixed findings highlight that promotions are most effective when coupled with interactive content and social validation, not as standalone tactics.

Moderating and Mediating Variables

Multiple studies reveal the importance of psychological and contextual variables that shape the affiliate marketing–purchase relationship. Asadiyah et al. (2023) demonstrated that purchase intention positively moderates the link between affiliate marketing and purchasing decisions. Ibrahim and Suhermin (2025) showed that brand image mediates the impact of affiliate marketing on purchasing behavior, emphasizing its psychological role in transforming marketing stimuli into decisions. Prasetyo (2025) added that religiosity moderates the influence of affiliate marketing on purchase intention where consumers with strong religious commitment respond more favourably to affiliate messages that align with their values. These findings collectively indicate that purchase intention, brand image and religiosity are crucial relational mechanisms that determine how strongly affiliate strategies influence consumer behavior.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Discussion and Implications

The synthesis of twelve empirical studies highlights that affiliate marketing on TikTok has significantly transformed the digital purchasing landscape particularly among Generation Z consumers. Findings reveal that purchase intention on TikTok is shaped through an interplay of trust, social influence, content quality and interactivity. When viewed through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), these determinants correspond to the three central constructs of the model: attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). However, beyond theoretical mapping, these studies also illustrate practical mechanisms such as live streaming, user-generated content (UGC) and algorithmic engagement that extend TPB into the realities of short-form video commerce.

Theoretical Discussion

From a theoretical perspective, the reviewed evidence supports and extends TPB in several ways. First, attitude toward affiliate marketing is shaped by perceived trust, authenticity, and brand image (Novilia et al, 2024; Ibrahim & Suhermin, 2025). When affiliate messages appear transparent and value-driven, consumers develop positive evaluations that strengthen purchase intention. Second, subjective norms or perceived social pressure to buy are reinforced by peer validation and influencer endorsement as confirmed by Azmi et al. (2025) and Dung and An (2024). The social proof embedded in likes, comments, and shared content acts as a normative driver of consumer behavior. Third, perceived behavioral control is enhanced through interactive features such as live streaming and Q&A sessions that allow consumers to clarify doubts and witness product authenticity in real time (Prasetyo, 2025).

Together, these mechanisms illustrate that TikTok's affiliate marketing ecosystem strengthens all three TPB components simultaneously, transforming passive consumers into active participants in the buying process.

Moreover, the review identifies several contextual moderators, notably religiosity, brand image, and purchase intention that deepen the understanding of consumer behavior. For example, Prasetyo (2025) demonstrated that religiosity intensifies the persuasive power of affiliate content when moral values align with the product message, while Ibrahim and Suhermin (2025) found that brand image mediates between affiliate communication and behavioral intention. These patterns suggest that extending TPB with cultural and affective variables can improve its explanatory capacity in social commerce contexts.

Managerial and Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, the findings underscore that authenticity, social connection and interactivity are the cornerstones of successful TikTok affiliate marketing. Brands should prioritize partnerships with credible micro-influencers whose values align with their target audiences to build sustained trust. Encouraging user-generated content such as reviews, duets or shared experiences which can amplify social validation turning audiences into community advocates.

Marketers are also advised to integrate live streaming as a core tactic for demonstrating transparency and engaging consumers emotionally. Unlike static advertising, live sessions reduce psychological distance and increase perceived behavioral control by enabling real-time interaction. Furthermore, brands should design value-based campaigns that resonate with cultural and ethical norms such as halal certification, sustainability or women empowerment to tap into deeper motivational drivers of purchase intention.

Finally, marketers should continuously monitor engagement metrics (likes, comments, watch duration) to adapt their content strategies dynamically. On TikTok, visibility itself functions as a social cue; each interaction reinforces perceived popularity and reliability, thus feeding into the cycle of social proof and consumer trust.

Integrative Reflection

By combining theoretical insight and practical observation, this review demonstrates that TikTok affiliate marketing operates as both a psychological and social system. Theoretically, TPB remains a strong framework for explaining intention, yet its constructs are now enacted through digital affordances such as authentic content (attitude), algorithmic virality (subjective norm) and live interactivity (perceived control). Practically, success in TikTok commerce depends less on persuasive slogans and more on meaningful engagement where credibility, culture and community converge to shape consumer action.

In sum, effective affiliate marketing in the TikTok era requires understanding that purchase intention is not a linear decision, but a socially negotiated experience driven by trust, belonging, and digital participation.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This comprehensive review of twelve empirical studies on affiliate marketing within the TikTok platform provides valuable insights into how social media dynamics influence consumer purchase intention. The findings reveal that TikTok's affiliate ecosystem operates at the intersection of trust, social influence, interactivity and content quality factors that collectively shape consumers' attitudes and behavioral intentions in digital commerce. While the platform's short-form, entertainment-driven environment promotes creativity and engagement, it also demands authenticity and credibility from affiliates and brands seeking to build meaningful consumer relationships.

Interpreted through behavioral and marketing perspectives consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this review underscores that the key psychological drivers of purchase intention attitudes, perceived social norms and perceived control are dynamically expressed in TikTok's social commerce environment. Trust and content authenticity cultivate positive attitudes; peer validation and influencer engagement reinforce social norms; and interactive features such as live streaming and real-time feedback enhance perceived behavioral control. These findings demonstrate that TikTok transforms traditional pathways of persuasion into interactive and socially mediated experiences that drive consumer action.

From a theoretical standpoint, the review extends existing behavioral and marketing insights by contextualizing them within a highly participatory, algorithm-driven medium. The results suggest that frameworks like TPB remain relevant but must adapt to digital ecosystems where social proof, interactivity and algorithmic exposure redefine consumer motivation. From a managerial perspective, brands should prioritize authenticity, micro-influencer partnerships and live engagement strategies that foster two-way communication and community belonging rather than one-way promotion.

In conclusion, this paper contributes to both academic and practical understanding by integrating behavioral insights with empirical evidence on TikTok-based affiliate marketing.

Limitations

Across the twelve reviewed studies on TikTok affiliate marketing, several common limitations emerged. Most research was geographically narrow focusing on specific Indonesian cities (e.g., Medan, Jakarta, Surabaya) with little representation from other Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam or the Philippines which limiting generalizability. Samples were demographically homogeneous and mainly female Generation Z students or young adults.

Methodologically, most studies used quantitative cross-sectional surveys analysed via SPSS or SmartPLS relying on self-reported data and lacking causal or longitudinal insights. Only one study adopted a qualitative approach. Research also tended to examine limited variables (e.g., affiliate marketing, product quality, promotion), neglecting constructs like trust, influencer credibility and emotional engagement. Additionally, studies focused mainly on TikTok and on specific product categories (e.g., fashion, cosmetics), restricting comparative and external validity.

Future Research

Future research should explore additional behavioral and psychological frameworks to complement

existing marketing theories. While the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) provides a useful lens to interpret purchase intention, integrating it with emerging models such as the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework, Uses and Gratifications Theory or Social Influence Theory could capture the emotional and entertainment-driven dynamics of TikTok interactions. Furthermore, scholars could develop hybrid behavioral models that incorporate factors like algorithmic exposure, parasocial relationships and emotional engagement, which are increasingly relevant in social commerce environments.

To overcome current limitations, future research on TikTok affiliate marketing should expand demographic and geographic diversity by including participants from multiple age groups, socio-economic levels and regions across and beyond Southeast Asia. Broader representation would improve cultural and behavioral generalizability. Methodologically, adopting mixed-method and longitudinal designs is recommended to integrate quantitative rigor with qualitative depth allowing exploration of both cognitive and emotional dimensions of consumer decisions.

Researchers are also urged to include additional constructs such as trust, influencer authenticity, emotional engagement, religiosity, brand image and customer experience to develop more comprehensive models. Comparative analyses between TikTok and other social commerce platforms (e.g., Shopee, Instagram) are needed to examine variations in trust, usability and content effectiveness. Future studies should also move beyond fashion and cosmetics to diverse product categories like technology, food and lifestyle goods. Ultimately, advancing this field requires methodological diversity, cross-cultural inquiry, and theoretical integration that combine psychological, technological and sociocultural perspectives.

CONFLICT OFF INTEREST

The author has no conflicts of interest, whether financial or otherwise, in conducting this research.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

The authors jointly contributed to the conception, design, data collection, analysis, and preparation of this manuscript. The author also prepared, reviewed, and approved the final manuscript.

AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

All data and materials used in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Not applicable.

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